

Representative Bill Eickmeyer

A Report to the 35th District

• Primary elections.

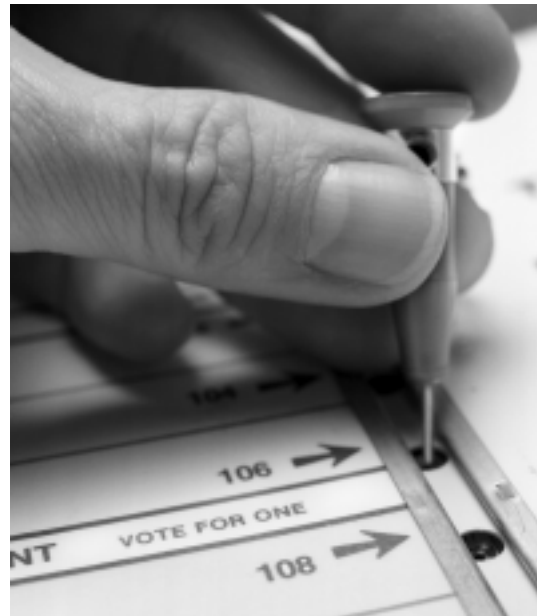
Federal-court decisions have directed that our nearly 70-year-old blanket-primary system must be scrapped.

The governor partially vetoed the primary-election legislation we passed. This means that we will almost certainly have a Montana-type primary ballot this fall. Primary-election-voters will select a ballot for a certain party of their choice – and vote only for those names on the primary ballot.

No one will know which party you chose – and no one will know for whom you voted. As before in the general election, you'll select any candidate from any party you want.

Like most of you, I like the blanket primary system that we've lost. But the reality is that it has been ruled unconstitutional.

This new system is the best compromise that we can find right now.



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Rules

Trade & Economic Development (Vice Chair)

Capital Budget

Agriculture & Natural Resources

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Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Thank you for reviewing my report on the 2004 Legislative Session. It is a great honor to represent our communities and neighborhoods in Mason, Grays Harbor, Kitsap, and Thurston counties!

Here's a headline I'm terribly frightened we might be seeing one of these days — all too soon: "*Washington citizens mourn death of Hood Canal.*"

Is it too late to save Hood Canal? No, it isn't. But after a frustrating legislative session like the one we just finished, I'm beginning to wonder. Some of my legislative colleagues simply refuse to see the peril. I ask myself what it will take to make folks understand that Hood Canal — which is as wonderful a natural resource and treasure as can be found anywhere in our state! — is in imminent jeopardy.

The bulk of today's *Report to the 35th District* details my work to help rescue the Canal. I've also reviewed issues involving economic development, education, health care, and the new primary-election system.

Please feel free to get in touch with me to share your comments. I need your participation to best represent our part of the world in the state Legislature!

Sincerely,

Bill Eickmeyer

State Representative
35th Legislative District

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35th District**

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Hood Canal: A great resource is at serious risk of becoming a true deadzone

Lack of dissolved oxygen in the Hood Canal threatens to convert these beautiful waters into a "Dead Sea."

The normal "winter recovery" did not occur this year, and we are nearing the dangerous summer months when algae bloom and other conditions that cause problems will be at their highest levels. All the species which live in Hood Canal, even those that require a minimum level of dissolved oxygen, are threatened with unrecoverable extinction.

To better understand this problem, we first have to recognize that nature has produced these conditions for thousands of years, but has always (as far as we know) provided a means of self-correction. It is apparent, however, that the "natural" process is now overwhelmed.

Some of the human-caused contributors to this dilemma are already known, and are classified as "nutrients" that accelerate the growth of plankton and algae. This list includes, among other things, leaking septic systems, fertilizers washed into the Canal by storm drainage and rising rivers, and thousands of salmon carcasses that are dumped back in the Canal after their eggs have been harvested.

As we better understand these possible contributors, we can take steps to make corrections. We already have some science-base to make this analysis.

But what we don't have — and what is glaringly absent from our science-base — is an understanding of how nature corrected this problem over thousands of years.

Can we assume, for just one moment, that all the biologies that exist are there for a reason?

Can we also assume that there is a complex interrelationship between all species and chemistries that must be understood and respected if we are to establish healthy guidelines for the management and protection of these precious resources?

A number of years ago, an Asian market was found for sea cucumbers. Harvested to near extinction, sea cucumbers are no longer strongly viable as part of our ecosystem. We now know that these critters were nature's "vacuum cleaners" that fed on the very biomass that is contributing to the dissolved oxygen problem. Were they part of nature's plan?

• A healthy ecosystem

Deep-water geoducks that process huge quantities of plankton and algae are being harvested by the millions from Hood Canal.

Are geoducks also one of nature's answers to a healthy ecosystem? No one knows for sure — and therein lies the problem. Until we do know, should we continue to destroy a species that can take from seven to 35 years to restore itself?

This year I introduced legislation that would have required the Department of Natural Resources to resolve this question before issuing any further permits for harvest.

Department-testimony before the committee centered on the loss of a few million dollars in revenue if harvest was discontinued. Their "science"-base was an assumption that since the geoduck-harvesting is in the northern part of the Canal (not in the



The health of Hood Canal and other great Washington waters demands our constant vigilance.

center of the existing oxygen-stress area), the clam probably doesn't play an important role. That's like saying that what we do in the upper stream will have no effect on the lower stream!

Where does the department think the water-exchange for Hood Canal comes from — except from the northern end?

Not understanding the "balance of nature" has gotten us into trouble with salmon, herring, true cod, lingcod, and smelt — to name a few. We seem ready to risk a whole body of water for a few more dollars. If we're wrong, it could cost us billions more in recovery-efforts — if recovery is even possible!

I was successful, though, in securing funding in the capital budget for the important work of the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group. This funding will enable the Salmon Enhancement Group to more actively pursue the oxygen problem — and provide a recovery plan that I will submit to the Legislature next year.

Other issues: Full legislative session takes on wide variety of concerns

I've written at length about the health of Hood Canal — which as you may have guessed is a legislative issue very close to my heart.

But it's certainly not the only topic we took up this year in Olympia.

Here are some of the other items on our agenda:

• Economic development.

We continued work toward creating dependable, good-paying jobs in the face of the three-year recession. Further tax credits are provided for information-technology companies in counties outside the Puget Sound region. Help-desk businesses and businesses that manufacture software in rural counties are firms we want to promote — *and keep* — in rural Washington. We also highlighted work-force training, and established incentives for research-and-development companies.

I was disappointed that the Senate refused to recognize the seriousness of the "offshoring" issue. Many millions of Washington-taxpayer dollars (and many thousands of jobs) are being sent to companies thousands of miles from our shores.

• Education.

We put common sense into high-school-graduation requirements. The idea is to make sure our students have a reasonable opportunity to clear this formidable hurdle. Further, our colleges and universities will have room for more students — and more financial assistance will be available for deserving students who want to pursue their dreams of a higher education.

• Health care.

We eliminated the premium for health-care coverage for Medicaid children in families whose income is no more than 150 percent of the federal poverty level. This means that 20,000 low-income kids *won't* be thrown out of basic health care! Also, small-business access to basic health insurance is improved in legislation we passed toward the end of our 60-day meeting.

I was disappointed that the Senate just said no to the idea of our state of Washington purchasing less-expensive prescription drugs from Canada. Our state is paying up to three times what we should for these needed medicines.

